

This field is mandatory!

Earthquake, fire and nuclear leak in Japan

Feature story - July 19, 2007

A 6.8 magnitude earthquake rocked the world's largest nuclear plant on Monday, causing a transi
Since then, revelations have been coming out about spills and leaks at the plant.



Japan-Nuclear-Spill

Initially, plant owner Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said there w
radioactivity. Then it said there was a small leak of radioactively contamin
the size of the leak turned out to be much larger than originally reported,
was 50 percent more radioactive than they had first said. Then it came ou
of nuclear waste barrels had fallen over, with the lids coming off dozens of
was revealed that cobalt-60 and chromium-51 was released into the atmo
exhaust stack.

Lucky?

It's hard to call the residents of Kashiwazaki lucky. Hundreds were injured by the quake, at least nine have
thousands have been rushed to emergency shelters. But, if any of the four working reactors had lost power
system, it could have gone much worse. From the [Citizens' Nuclear Information Center](#) :

Even after automatic shutdown, the fuel in the reactor core is still extremely hot, so it is necessary to
continual flow of coolant. If it is not maintained, the fuel could melt, leading to the release of highly ra
material into the environment. Under some circumstances, it could also result in an explosion.

Despite the potential seriousness of this fire, TEPCO failed to announce whether the transformer conti
or whether the emergency generator started up.

According to Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun, TEPCO admitted its disaster response measures did not
successfully, and that there were only four workers available to extinguish the fire, which burned for almost

The ground vibrations from the earthquake were more severe than the nuclear plant was designed to withsta
some indications that a previously undiscovered fault line runs under the plant. Japan is one of the world's r
prone countries, and also one of the most reliant on nuclear power. Not a good combination.

The delay in reporting leaks and spills also comes as no surprise to industry watchers, but it does seem that
government may finally be losing patience with an industry rocked by scandal for the past decade.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters, "They raised the alert too late. I have sent stern instructions that s
be raised seriously and swiftly." He continued, "Those involved should reflect on their actions."

"Nuclear power can only operate with the people's trust," Abe told reporters. The litany below shows that the
people's trust is standing operating procedure for Japan's nuclear industry.

Nuclear power is never safe, but it is even more dangerous with a potent combination of lies, cover-ups and
lines.

A lot to reflect on

The Japanese nuclear industry, and TEPCO in particular, is no stranger to scandal.

In 2002, three top TEPCO officials resigned after finally acknowledging that the company had violated safety falsified records at three of its largest nuclear power plants (including the one at Kashiwazaki). All 17 TEPCO ordered to shut down at the end of the investigation. The cover-up had been going on since the 1980s.

More examples:

March 2007 - It was discovered that the Hokuriku utility did not inform the public or nuclear inspectors about incident at Shika nuclear power plant where, on July 18th, 1999, failure of control rods lead to an uncontrolled

April 2006 - A radioactive spill of 40 litres of liquid containing plutonium occurs at a brand new reprocessing -Mura.

August 2004 - [A ruptured pipe in Mihama nuclear power plant kills five workers.](#)

July 2002 - A shipment of plutonium pellets [leaves Japan](#), on a return journey to the UK, after revelations that Fuels falsified records about safety checks in their production.

September 1999 - Workers at a fuel factory in [Tokaimura](#) fail to follow guidelines, leading to an uncontrolled that lasts for three days. Three workers die due to high irradiation and the neighbourhood is evacuated.

More examples in [this Boston Globe article](#) .

More information about Japan's nuclear program from the [Citizens' Nuclear Information Center](#) .